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SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA FRONT OFFICE, NEA/IPA, AND NEA/PPD
NSC FOR SHAPIRO/KUMAR

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PROP](#) [PHUM](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAO](#)

SUBJECT: PA ACCUSES AL JAZEERA OF INCITEMENT, SUSPENDING ITS
LICENSE AND CLOSING ITS OFFICES

¶1. Summary: The Palestinian Authority (PA) suspended Al Jazeera's license and closed its West Bank offices on July 15. PA officials accused the Qatar-based satellite news channel of systematic incitement and unbalanced coverage after it broadcast inflammatory allegations by Fatah Central Committee member-in-exile Farouq al Qaddoumi against PA President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) and Fatah Revolutionary Committee member Mohammad Dahlan. End Summary.

¶2. Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, in his capacity as Minister of Information, signed orders on July 15 closing Al Jazeera's Ramallah offices and suspending the license granted Al Jazeera by the PA. This was in response to the news channel's coverage of allegations made by Qaddoumi that Abu Mazen and Dahlan conspired with Israel and the USG to assassinate former PA President Yasser Arafat. This, in the PA's view, constituted systematic incitement and unbalanced coverage.

¶3. PA plainclothes security officers handed a closure order to staff in Al Jazeera's Ramallah office, shutting down West Bank operations of the news channel's Arabic and English services. (Al Jazeera's offices in Gaza and Jerusalem are unaffected by the PA's decision, since they do not fall under PA jurisdiction.) Prime Minister Fayyad ordered PA Attorney General Ahmad al Mughani to file a lawsuit against Al Jazeera on charges of incitement and reporting false information. Al Jazeera's Ramallah offices will remain closed and the license suspended until the court rules on the case.

¶4. The newly designated director of the PA Information Office, Ghassan al Khatib, criticized the PA's decision in statements to the press on July 15. He called the decision "hasty and irrational," and expressed hope that Al Jazeera's offices would reopen soon.

¶5. The PA Journalists' Union issued a statement calling on the PA to allow Al Jazeera's offices to reopen, demanding that the PA respect freedom of the press and freedom of speech. That said, the Union's statement also emphasized that Palestinian media must refrain from publishing material that might inflame the political situation. The local Foreign Press Association likewise expressed deep concern and urged the PA to reconsider its decision.

¶6. Hamas denounced the PA's decision and requested a "serious" investigation into Qaddoumi's allegations. Qaddoumi repeated them during a July 15 evening interview on Al Jazeera. He predicted he would be excluded from the Fatah Sixth Party Congress, due to take place in Bethlehem on August 4.

¶7. Note: The PA suspended the license of Al Jazeera in 2000 on similar grounds after the channel broadcast a doctored photo of Yasser Arafat with a shoe over his head. End note.

WALLES